

## *Res Romanae*: Cultural Politics in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica* and Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*\*

### Abstract

This paper juxtaposes Quintus' *Posthomerica* and Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* in terms of the political and ideological positions they adopt towards Rome, and argues that the way they represent Hellenic and Roman identities is characteristic of the different cultural environments in which they were written. The first section is concerned with the characterisation of Aeneas and Sinon in Books 11–13 of the *Posthomerica*; Quintus' depiction of these two characters reflects a contestation and re-negotiation between Roman and Greek identities, which is typical of the Second Sophistic period. The following section contrasts the treatment of the Pleiad Electra and the myths relevant to her in the two epics, in order to elucidate the differences between Quintus' and Nonnus' attitudes towards the Roman Empire. Finally, the third part of the paper turns to the question of Nonnus' embrace of Rome and Roman ideology, and briefly examines the phenomenon of the collapse of traditional Hellenism in Late Antiquity, as it is expressed in Book 41 of the poem, the story of Beirut.

### Introduction

Scholarship on Quintus' *Posthomerica* (*PH*) and Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* (*Dion.*) has been moving along parallel roads for a long time. Research concentrated on the stylistic and metrical features of these two Late Greek epics<sup>1</sup>, with a great deal of focus on *Quellenforschung*<sup>2</sup>. Although there have been some re-appraisals of the literary value of the two poems<sup>3</sup>, very little attention has been directed at their respective cultural contexts. One reason for this (although not a very satisfactory one) is that anachronisms and explicit references to the authors' own times are largely avoided in the *PH*, and, to a smaller degree, the *Dion.* As it will be seen, both works clearly refer to the Roman Empire, but these references are nowhere given privileged narrative positions: neither the beginning nor the end is defined by an explicit politics in these epics, whose action takes place in remote, pre-historical periods.

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\*I am grateful for helpful observations to Helen Morales, Sophia Papaioannou, and the editors of this volume.

<sup>1</sup> For a study that considered both poets see Wifstrand (1933).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Campbell (1981) for Quintus, and D'Ippolito (1964) for Nonnus.

<sup>3</sup> See Whitby (1994), esp. 114–8 for a re-appraisal of Quintus. For Nonnus see Hopkinson (1994c), and Shorrock (2001).

Another reason for the lack of attention to cultural poetics has to do with genre, and the status of epic in Late Antiquity. Unlike orations, panegyrics, hymns, declamations and most other literary genres that flourish between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, the performance context of epic is not clear<sup>4</sup>. We have no indications of an intended (even fictitious) occasion or audience; indeed there is no internal evidence that these poems were meant for public performance. It has, therefore, become the norm to view them as “private” literature, which is somehow imagined as a world entirely separated from contemporary society, politics, and ideologies. But even if Late Epic was intended for private reading *only*, it does not follow that it was “private” in the sense of being a-political.

The purpose of this paper is precisely to attempt an examination of the *PH* and the *Dion*. in the light of the political and social realities of their times. The paper will consider both explicit references to the Roman Empire in the two epics, and the suggestive handling of characterisation (for example, the Quintean Aeneas and Sinon), attempting to trace an important ideological development: from the accentuated and continuously re-defined Hellenism of the Second Sophistic to the prevalence of cultural pluralism during Late Antiquity.

#### Aeneas and Sinon in the *Posthomeric*

The representation of Aeneas and Sinon in Books 11–13 of the *PH* will be used here as a case study of Quintean cultural poetics. The two characters are of course more famous from their antithetical representation in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where they stand as embodiments of the “virtuous Roman” (Aeneas) and the “treacherous Greek” (Sinon)<sup>5</sup>. It will be argued that Quintus uses the same pair of heroes in order to make very different statements about Romanness and Greekness, and that in the delineation of these two characters we can see how a Greek poet performs and redefines Greek cultural identity in response to the imperialism of Rome (and Roman epic).

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<sup>4</sup> Appel (1994) 11–12 assumes an agonistic context for the performance of Quintus' epic, but his suggestion seems entirely speculative.

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion of Sinon's character below.

Quintus' use of Virgil's *Aeneid* as a model for certain episodes of the *PH* is still a moot point for scholars<sup>6</sup>. Gärtner's detailed study has found Virgilian influence very probable in some cases, but not beyond any doubt<sup>7</sup>. For my argument here evidence of direct influence and imitation is not crucial; what is important to note is that Quintus is most likely to have known the Virgilian version of Aeneas' story, if not from the original text, then from a translation or a summary<sup>8</sup>. Quintus' handling of these two characters can, therefore, be particularly significant for the way we are meant to see and interpret the Trojans as proto-Romans in this epic.

Aeneas is throughout the *PH* one of the bravest warriors of Troy, and gets his own *ἀριστεία* in Book 11, where we see him as the most important defender of the city, killing "countless hordes of Achaians"<sup>9</sup> (vv. 242–3: Ἀχαιῶν... μυρία φῦλα), and enjoying protection from the gods. The motivation behind divine interventions for Aeneas' protection is known, not only from Virgil, but already from Homer's *Iliad*. When Poseidon, ordinarily an enemy to the Trojans, rescues Aeneas from certain death in *Il.* 20.321–39, we learn, from his speech at 293–308, his reasons for doing so<sup>10</sup>:

«ἀλλὰ τίη νῦν οὗτος ἀναίτιος ἄλγεα πάσχει (297)  
μὰψ ἔνεκ' ἄλλοτρίων ἀχέων, κεχαρισμένα δ' αἰεὶ  
δῶρα θεοῖσι δίδωσι τοῖ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν;  
ἀλλ' ἄγεθ' ἡμεῖς πέρ μιν ὑπὲρ θανάτου ἀγάγωμεν, (300)  
μή πως καὶ Κρονίδης κεχολώσεται, αἴ κεν Ἀχιλλεὺς  
τόνδε κατακτείνῃ· μόριμον δέ οἱ ἔστ' ἀλέασθαι,  
ὄφρα μὴ ἄσπερμος γενεὴ καὶ ἄφαντος ὄληται  
Δαρδάνου, ὃν Κρονίδης περὶ πάντων φίλατο παίδων  
οἳ ἔθεν ἐξεγένοντο γυναικῶν τε θνητάων. (305)  
ἦδη γὰρ Πριάμου γενεὴν ἔχθηρε Κρονίων·  
νῦν δὲ δὴ Αἰνείαο βίη Τρώεσσιν ἀνάξει  
καὶ παίδων παῖδες, τοί κεν μετόπισθε γένωνται.»

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of scholarly discussions see Gärtner (2005) 30–7, and James (this volume) 1–4.

<sup>7</sup> See Gärtner (2005) 279–87.

<sup>8</sup> It is known that a freedman called Polybius wrote a paraphrase or translation, around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. C.E. For the knowledge of Latin in the Greek East see Gärtner (2005) 13–22.

<sup>9</sup> Translations of the *PH* are from James (2004).

<sup>10</sup> The text is reproduced from West (2000).

“But why should he, a guiltless man, suffer woes vainly because of sorrows that are not his own, though he always gives acceptable gifts to the gods who hold broad heaven? But come, let us lead him out from death, lest the son of Cronos be angry in some way if Achilles slays him; for it is fated for him to escape so that the race of Dardanus may not perish without seed and be seen no more – Dardanus whom the son of Cronos loved above all the children born to him from mortal women. For now has the son of Cronos come to hate the race of Priam; and now surely will the mighty Aeneas be king among the Trojans, and his sons’ sons who will be born in days to come.”<sup>11</sup>

Poseidon’s speech contains two significant elements for the character of Aeneas: his piety, and the sense that he has a great destiny to fulfill. A scholiast saw in the last two lines a prophetic reference to Rome<sup>12</sup>. It is also reported that a variant *πάντεσσι* was invented to replace *Τρώεσσιν* in v. 307, thus giving a more explicitly “Roman” justification for Aeneas’ rescue: he had to be saved because his race is destined to rule over the whole world<sup>13</sup>. Quintus’ Aeneas receives divine assistance on three occasions in Book 11, but his rescue is connected neither with his piety, nor with the destiny of the Dardanean race. When Thetis (vv. 240–2) directs the fury of her grandson, Neoptolemus, away from Aeneas, she acts “out of respect for the goddess of love” (v. 241: *ἄζομένη Κυθέρειαν*). Aphrodite herself snatches Aeneas from the battle in vv. 289–93, but the justification for this is simply that “it was not that hero’s fate to fight in the fray / Any more against the Argives in front of the lofty walls” (vv. 292–3: *οὐ γὰρ ἔτ’ αἴσιμον ἦεν ἀνὰ μόθον ἀνέρι κείνῳ / μάρνασθ’ Ἀργείοισι πρὸ τείχεος αἰπεινοῖο*)<sup>14</sup>. Finally, no motivation is given when Aphrodite diverts one of Philoctetes’ arrows onto the shield of her son (v. 479).

Mansur observes that Aeneas’ preservation has been turned into a family matter, and claims that the reason why his protection “is not closely connected

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<sup>11</sup> Translation by Murray – Wyatt (1999).

<sup>12</sup> See sch. vet. 307–8a2: τὸ “νῦν” τὸ μέλλον δηλοῖ. οἱ δὲ Αἰνείου ἀπόγονοι καὶ Ῥώμην κτίζουσιν (“the ‘now’ refers to the future. The descendants of Aeneas will also be the founders of Rome”).

<sup>13</sup> See sch. vet. 307a1: μεταγράφουσί τινες “Αἰνείῳ γενεῇ πάντεσσι ἀνάξει”, ὡς προθεσπίζοντος τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν (“some correct to ‘the descendants of Aeneas will rule over everybody’ as if the poet had foretold the empire of the Romans”). Cf. Strab. 13.1.53.

<sup>14</sup> Although a hint at Aeneas’ Roman destiny should not be excluded in the use of *αἴσιμον* (“fate”, v. 292), it is important that this remains no more than a hint.

with his future seems to be that Quintus has not co-ordinated his material as well as Homer”<sup>15</sup>. My suggestion here is that Quintus’ narrative at this point deliberately suppresses information about Aeneas’ destiny and the future success of his race. As the narration approaches the climactic moment of the fall of Troy, and the idea of Aeneas as not just a Trojan hero, but also the *ancestor* of the Romans, becomes increasingly relevant, Quintus’ silence over the glory of Rome is emphatic, and could be an indication of the “certain distance” from Rome that authors of the Second Sophistic characteristically maintain<sup>16</sup>. A *post factum* prophecy concerning Aeneas’ offspring and the Roman Empire would have been readily available to Quintus, to provide strong motivation of cosmic consequence for the hero’s repeated rescues. This prophecy is withheld until Book 13, and will be examined in its own context later on.

It is also relevant at this point that, if we suppose an (even indirect) knowledge of the *Aeneid* by Quintus<sup>17</sup>, the Trojans’ breaking up of a Greek *testudo*, which Virgil describes as part of the last, and ultimately unsuccessful, defence of Troy (A. 2.438–68) is transposed by Quintus into a previous battle (11.336–473), where the Trojans’ defence is actually unbreakable, and the Greeks seem to be fighting in vain<sup>18</sup>. The effect is that the Posthomeric Aeneas’ actions have little of the desperate, noble endeavour we see in the *Aeneid*. So, when he throws a stone from the walls and kills one of Philoctetes’ companions, it does not seem inappropriate for Philoctetes to reproach him for fighting in a womanly manner<sup>19</sup>; Aeneas is no longer the tragic hero, fighting for a lost cause, and bound to win the reader’s sympathy<sup>20</sup>:

«Αἰνεία, σύ γ’ ἔολπας ἐνὶ φρεσὶ σῇσιν ἄριστος (491)  
ἔμμεναι ἐκ πύργου πονεύμενος, ἔνθα γυναιῖκες

<sup>15</sup> See Mansur (1940) 7–10.

<sup>16</sup> Swain (1996) 89. Cf. Whitmarsh (2001b).

<sup>17</sup> Gärtner (2005) 114–32 finds the hypothesis that Quintus used the *testudo*-scenes of Virg. A. 2 and 9 compelling. Cf. James (2004) 323 and 326 n. 358–407, and (this volume) 6–7.

<sup>18</sup> Note also how Quintus “personalises” the account of the Greeks’ *testudo*: in vv. 447–73 the narrative focuses on a young Locrian, Alcimedon, who attempts to open the way for his men, “his heart possessed by intrepid resolve” (v. 454: *ἄτρομον ἐνθήμενος κραδίη νόον*). Unlike Virgil’s Greeks, who are killed *en masse* (2.465–7), Quintus’ brave Alcimedon creates more sympathy for the Greek side than for the Trojan.

<sup>19</sup> Throwing objects at the enemy from the walls was indeed something women would be doing in besieged cities; see Thuc. 2.4 and 3.74, Virg. A. 11.891–5, and the observations of Kern (1999) 154–5, 166, and 284–5.

<sup>20</sup> For Quintus’ text I am using the edition of Vian (1969).

δυσμένεσιν μάρνανται ἀνάλκιδες; Εἰ δέ τίς ἐσσι,  
ἔρχεο τείχεος ἔκτ' ἐν ἔντεσιν, ὄφρα δαίης  
Ποίαντος θρασὺν υἱὰ καὶ ἔγχεσι καὶ βελέεσσιν.» (495)

“Aineias, do you imagine that you are the bravest, (491)  
When all your work is from the towers, the place  
Where feeble women fight their foes? If you are someone,  
Come down from the wall with your arms and make the acquaintance  
Of Poias’ valiant son by the use of spears and arrows.” (495)

Philoctetes’ taunts could function as a negative commentary on the valour of the Virgilian hero, the *Roman* Aeneas. We should consider here the possibility that Quintus engages with the Virgilian tradition in a more independent and active manner than was assumed until recently. At the very least, it is significant that Book 11, which was largely about Aeneas’ ἀριστεία, reaches its end without allowing its central hero to reply to Philoctetes: as the fighting was raging around the walls, Aeneas did not have the opportunity to answer back, “although he wished to” (v. 497: καὶ περ ἐελδόμενος). Is it really because he cannot get a break from the battle? Epic heroes can usually manage to shout insults at each other amid the fiercest battles. In a comparable situation in *Aeneid* 9, after an Italian *testudo* fails (9.506–17)<sup>21</sup>, Numanus Remulus upbraids the Trojans for “skulking from death behind battlements”<sup>22</sup> (v. 599: *morti praetendere muros*), and so being “Phrygian women” (v. 617: *Phrygiae*)<sup>23</sup>; in this case the answer comes swiftly in the form of an arrow shot by Ascanius, which instantly kills Remulus. Quintus, by contrast, seems reluctant to allow his soon-to-be Roman hero any kind of response, leaving Philoctetes have the last word at the end of the book that was supposed to describe *Aeneas*’ most glorious moment.

As Clausen has pointed out, Aeneas “is conspicuously absent from Book 12, the story of the Wooden Horse; nor is he shown later fighting in defense of the

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<sup>21</sup> This *testudo* has also been considered as a model for the Quintean one; see Keydell (1954) 254–6, and Gärtner (2005) 118–27.

<sup>22</sup> Translation by Lewis (1986).

<sup>23</sup> On the charge of Phrygian effeminacy in Remulus’ speech see now Reed (2007) 112–4.

city”<sup>24</sup>. Now, to avoid implicating Aeneas in the process of taking the fatally wrong decision over the Wooden Horse is consistent both with the tradition, and with Quintus’ general tendency to avoid any material obviously disparaging to his leading heroes<sup>25</sup>. Virgil’s Aeneas is also never mentioned in the Wooden Horse scene; but as soon as he becomes aware of the deceit, he takes action, and has to be commanded by his divine mother to abandon the city, (A. 594–620) before he finally does so<sup>26</sup>.

Quintus’ Aeneas is a very different man: his resistance to the capture of the city is passed over in two lines (13.301–2). When he sees the city in flames, he loses hope, and ponders “how to escape that great disaster” (v. 308: *μέγα πῆμ’ ὑπαλύξαι*). Taking his father on his shoulders, and his son by the hand, he virtually tramples on dead bodies (325–6), in order to get out of the city. Quintus does not make any references to Creusa or the household-gods, but has Aphrodite present, guiding and protecting them from flames, spears, and arrows<sup>27</sup>. This time we do hear a prophecy, justifying Aeneas’ rescue, and connecting him with the Roman Empire. Significantly, though, this prophecy does not come from a divinity or the main narrator, but from the mouth of the Greek seer. Kalchas, in a role that is otherwise unattested<sup>28</sup>, warns the army not to attack Aeneas, and explains why they should respect him:

«Ἵσχεσθ’ Αἰνείαιο κατ’ ἰφθίμοιο καρήνου  
 βάλλοντες στονόεντα βέλη καὶ λοίγια δοῦρα. (335)  
 Τὸν γὰρ θέσφατόν ἐστι θεῶν ἐρικυδέι βουλῇ  
Θύμβριν ἐπ’ εὐρυρέεθρον ἀπὸ Ξάνθοιο μολόντα  
 τευξέμεν ἱερὸν ἄστυ καὶ ἐσσομένοισιν ἀγητὸν  
 ἀνθρώποις, αὐτὸν δὲ πολυσπερέεσσι βροτοῖσι  
 κοιρανέειν· ἐκ τοῦ δὲ γένος μετόπισθεν ἀνάξειν (340)  
 ἄχρις ἐπ’ Ἄντολίην τε καὶ ἀκάματον Δύσιν ἐλθεῖν.  
 Καὶ γὰρ οἱ θέμις ἐστὶ μετέμμεναι ἀθανάτοισιν,

<sup>24</sup> See Clausen (1987) 32.

<sup>25</sup> For this tendency see Mansur (1940) 59, and James (2004) xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>26</sup> For Aeneas’ stubborn resistance in Virg. A. 2 see Knox (1950) 392–3, and Clausen (1987) 32.

<sup>27</sup> For the similarities between some of the scenes in the *PH* and Virg. A. 2.632–804 see Gärtner (2005) 244–8, and the notes in James (2004) 337. Vian (1969) 122–3, who assumes a lost Hellenistic poem as the common source for Quintus and Virgil, draws attention to some parallels between this passage and the *Or. Sib.* 11.146–61.

<sup>28</sup> See James (2004) 337, n. 333–51.

οὔνεκα δὴ πάις ἐστὶν ἑυπλοκάμου Ἀφροδίτης.  
Καὶ δ' ἄλλως τοῦδ' ἄνδρὸς ἐὰς ἀπεχώμεθα χεῖρας,  
οὔνεκά οἱ χρυσοῖο καὶ ἄλλοις ἐν κτεάτεσσιν (345)  
ἄνδρα σαοὶ φεύγοντα καὶ ἄλλοδαπὴν ἐπὶ γαῖαν,  
τῶν πάντων προβέβουλεν ἔον πατέρ' ἥδ' καὶ υἱά...»

“Stop making the head of mighty Aeneas the target  
Of your deadly arrows and your murderous spears. (335)  
It is destined by the glorious will of the gods  
That he shall go from the Xanthos to the broad-flowing Tiber  
To found a sacred city, an object of awe to future  
Generations, and be the king of widely scattered  
People. The rule of the line descended from him shall later (340)  
Extend to the rising sun and its eternal setting.  
It is his right to join the ranks of the immortals,  
Because he is the offspring of fair tressed Aphrodite.  
Another reason why we should not lay hands on this man  
Is that in preference to gold or any other possessions (345)  
That can protect an exile in a foreign land,  
To all that he has preferred his father and his son.”

His speech is an interesting combination of motifs: Aeneas' reaching the Tiber (v. 337), the universal rule of his descendants' Empire (vv. 339–41), and his own deification (vv. 342–3) are all found in several passages of the *Aeneid*<sup>29</sup>. But the fact that Aeneas' salvation is made here to depend not only on divine assistance or his own courage and piety, but also on the Greeks' benevolence towards him, and their recognition of his special status points to a version other than the Virgilian (or, more generally, Roman)<sup>30</sup>. Vv. 344–7. refer to another tradition, one more flattering for the victorious Achaeans, which is attested in several Greek authors, from Xenophon (*Cynegeticus* 1.15) to Ps-Apollodorus (*Epitome* 5.21)<sup>31</sup>, but which is conspicuously absent from the *Aeneid*. According

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<sup>29</sup> See Virg. A. 2.782 for a prophecy mentioning the Tiber; 1.282, and 6.794–7 for the Romans' universal rule; 1.259–60 and 12.794–5 for Aeneas' deification.

<sup>30</sup> In *PH* 13.350–1 the Greeks look upon Aeneas as if he was a god, but this is dependent on heeding the words of Kalchas, not on Aeneas' own nature.

<sup>31</sup> See Vian (1969) 228, n. 3, and Gärtner (2005) 246–7 for more Greek sources that record Aeneas' escape.



to this version, the Greeks see Aeneas carrying the family gods and his aged father (and not gold or silver as others were doing, according to Diodorus Siculus 7.2), and decide to assist their noble enemy, by allowing him to escape safely. Quintus' combination of the two traditions (and points of view) can tell us something about the contestation, not only of literary heritages, but also of cultural identities and political ideologies.

This passage could, in fact, be seen as an instantiation of the cultural process which has been named, in the title of an influential article<sup>32</sup>, “becoming Roman, staying Greek”; in vv. 336–43 the narrator performs the “becoming Roman” part, and in vv. 344–9 the “staying Greek” or, more precisely, the “becoming Greek”<sup>33</sup>, as Greekness is revealed to be not a stable idea, but a continuous process of self-definition. To a large extent, the narrator of the *PH* appears here to be sympathetic to Rome, and to endorse its political ideology of unqualified, divinely ordained world rule. The underlying tensions, however, which are revealed if we read more closely the praise of Rome in vv. 336–43, are indicative of the ideological and cultural tensions inherent in the process of “becoming Roman”.

Again, what is said is just as important as what is left out of this praise: the stress is on the universality of the future Empire (vv. 339–41), with no mention whatsoever of the benefits this might bring<sup>34</sup>. The *τόποι* of the Empire being peaceful, prosperous, and just, which had already been employed in a Greek epic Quintus read and alluded to<sup>35</sup>, Oppian's *Halieutica*<sup>36</sup>, have no place in the *PH*. And, if Quintus' Roman Empire is limitless in space, it is not so in time: the *τόπος* of the Empire's eternity is also omitted<sup>37</sup>. Rome itself is not mentioned by

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<sup>32</sup> See Woolf (1994).

<sup>33</sup> Whitmarsh (2001a) 23.

<sup>34</sup> Kakridis (1962) 117 found the praise of the Roman Empire so modest that he suggested a very late date for the poem: “πρέπει να υποθέσουμε πώς ή μεταφορά της πρωτεύουσας στην Κωνσταντινούπολη καί ό έκχριστιανισμός της αυτοκρατορίας έχουν αφαιρέσει από τη Ρώμη καί τον παλιό της μύθο ένα μεγάλο μέρος της ιστορικής αίγλης τους”; “we have to assume that the transfer of the capital to Constantinople and the christianisation of the Empire have deprived Rome and its old myth of a big part of their traditional prestige” (my translation). On the inconclusiveness of this passage for the purpose of dating the poem see James – Lee (2000) 5–9, and Gärtner (2005) 24.

<sup>35</sup> See Kneebone ([this volume](#)) 2–3.

<sup>36</sup> See the elaborate passage in Opp. *H.* 2.664–88, where Dike is restored to the world thanks to Roman rule. Oppian refers to or addresses the Roman emperor repeatedly (*H.* 1.66, 77–9; 2.41; 4.4–6).

<sup>37</sup> Contrast, e.g., Virg. *A.* 1.278–9, Triph. 651–5, Nonn. *D.* 3.199.

name; the periphrasis employed to denote the capital of the Empire, “the sacred city” (v. 338: *ἱερὸν ἄστυ*), is a formula otherwise used exclusively for Troy<sup>38</sup>; in fact, one of the last images of this same book will be the “sacred city” (of Troy) falling, with Zeus unable to help (13.558). The fact that Rome becomes linguistically interchangeable with her doomed “mother-city” is suggestive of a Rome that is not eternal, but just as ephemeral as her predecessor.

This is not to say that Quintus sets out to write his epic with a hidden, “anti-Roman” agenda<sup>39</sup>. Rather, my contention here is that it is both possible and useful for our understanding of the *PH* to trace in Quintus’ epic an oblique expression of the political and ideological phenomenon of the Second Sophistic. A poet whose name, “Κόιντος”, is a transparent Hellenisation of the Roman “Quintus”, and who professes himself a native of Smyrna, even if (or especially if) for meta-poetical effect<sup>40</sup>, is, in a way, himself an incarnation of that very ambivalent attitude towards Rome we have come to see as the ideological hallmark of the Second Sophistic<sup>41</sup>. While Greeks of this period identify politically with Rome and largely subscribe to its imperialist ideology (as this narrative seems to be doing in the first part of Kalchas’ prophecy), the persistence and intensification of the need to be Greek<sup>42</sup>, to write in (“pure”) Greek<sup>43</sup>, and, in this case, to ‘correct’ a Roman narrative that portrayed Greeks negatively is an indication of resistance to full cultural integration<sup>45</sup>. The intricate way these ideological tensions are played out in certain (mainly “public”-orientated) prose genres has been considered in a number of modern studies<sup>46</sup>. However, a deep awareness of being Greek, and a need to constantly re-create and re-define cultural identities was “part of the literary game” even if

<sup>38</sup> See *PH* 2.242; 3.216, 284; 5.191; 12.235, 351; 13.558.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Anti-Roman’ would be an unsuccessful formulation in any case. It is very unlikely that Quintus and his contemporaries would be thinking in terms such as ‘anti-Roman’ or ‘pro-Greek’. See Kennedy’s (1992) remarks on the anachronistic nature of the terms ‘Augustan’ and ‘anti-Augustan’.

<sup>40</sup> See the discussion by Bär ([this volume](#)) 23–5 (section 4.1)

<sup>41</sup> See above, pp. 3 and 6.

<sup>42</sup> Of course this need was not shared to the same degree by *every* author writing in Greek. Lucian repeatedly calls himself a Syrian or barbarian; see Swain (1996) 299 n. 5.

<sup>43</sup> But see the ironisation of this trend in Lucian’s *Jud. Voc.*

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Swain (1996) 88–9.

<sup>46</sup> See Anderson (1993), Swain (1996), Schmitz (1997), Whitmarsh (2001a).

it was “not the motivating force for composing”<sup>47</sup>, and can be seen to manifest itself even in genres that have not normally been seen as political<sup>48</sup>.

My last example in this section is another case of Quintus’ revision of Roman literature and ideology. Many scholars have commented on the radical differences in the representations of Sinon in Virgil (A. 2.57–198) and Quintus (13.360–88)<sup>49</sup>: Virgil’s Sinon is the embodiment of Greek treachery, and dangerous rhetoric; Quintus presents us with a steadfast, brave hero, who endures torture without revealing the truth about the Wooden Horse. Discussion of the Posthomeric passage has been dominated by the question of sources, and the possibility of Virgilian influence on Quintus. Campbell argues vehemently against such a possibility:

“It may be said at once that direct imitation is out of the question, unless Q. had a remarkably stubborn temperament – so stubborn that, having scanned what V. had to say on the building of the Horse, on Sinon, on Laocoon, on the introduction of the Horse, he promptly forgot or ignored almost every memorable detail, and instead contented himself with reflecting, not always with precision, and sometimes in a spirit of blatant contradiction, the underlying structure, preferring to go elsewhere for a large variety of key elements in the saga<sup>50</sup>.”

As Gärtner points out<sup>51</sup>, however, the fact that Quintus did not slavishly imitate Virgil does not mean there is no relationship between them; in fact, the reason why we have here two so very different and partial representations of Sinon (as opposed to his neutral characterisation in earlier narratives) makes it

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<sup>47</sup> Whitmarsh (2001a) 250.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., the most recent study of politics and cultural identity in Chariton: Smith (2007) 10–13.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., Jones (1965) 126, Vrugt–Lentz (1967), Manuwald (1985) 207, Clausen (1987) 33, Deroux (1988) 887, and James (this volume) 5.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell (1981) 117–8. Vian (1959a) 100, and Gerlaud (1982) 23 argue that there is a common, now lost, source for the versions in Virg. A., Q.S., and Triph., and that Virgil is the one who deviates from it, whereas Triphiodorus, who has Sinon inflicting wounds on himself before appearing to the Trojans, reflects it more closely. Vrugt–Lentz (1967), on the other hand, presents a more complicated theory: he supposes that Quintus had read (the play itself or the Hypothesis of) Sophocles’ *Sinon*. The play is lost to us, but the article’s argument is that the hero would have to suffer some terrible misfortune that would cause the audience’s sympathy. This is more likely to have been torture in the hands of the Trojans, rather than self-mutilation. Finally, the motif of cutting one’s ears and nose could have been suggested to Sophocles by Hdt. 3.154–60, the story of Zopyrus. Jones (1965) 126–7 also makes some vague connection between Sinon and the Zopyrus of Herodotus.

<sup>51</sup> See Gärtner (2005) 177–91, esp. 181–2.

very likely that Quintus read either in the original or from translation Virgil's Sinon, and wanted to efface that very antipathetic picture of Greekness that defined the Roman version of this myth<sup>52</sup>. Just as Virgil's motives behind the representation of Sinon as an unscrupulous liar were deeply political, and had a lot to do with the Romans' self-definition as a manly, sincere, and "artless" nation<sup>53</sup>, so is Quintus' recasting of Sinon as an *exemplum* of heroic behaviour (with the Trojans taking the role of the villain) a sign of politico-ideological resistance.

Quintus' handling of the story of Sinon proves to be a systematic un-doing of the Virgilian version. Whereas Sinon's perjury allowed Virgil's Aeneas "to claim a military stand-off and moral superiority while admitting defeat"<sup>54</sup>, Quintus' Trojans are collectively guilty for the "shameful treatment" (v. 371) of a very sympathetic Sinon (12.364-73)<sup>55</sup>:

...καὶ πολλὰ δολόφρονα φῶτα δάιζον  
πολλὸν ἐπὶ χρόνον αἰέν. Ὅ δ' ἔμπεδον ἥτε πέτρη (365)  
μίμνεν ἀτειρέα γυῖ' ἐπιειμένος. Ὅψ' δ' ἄρ' αὐτοῦ  
οὐαθ' ὁμῶς καὶ ῥῖνας ἀπὸ μελέων ἐτάμοντο  
πάμπαν ἀεικίζοντες, ὅπως νημερτέα εἶπη,  
ὅππῃ ἔβαν Δαναοί, σὺν νήεσιν ἡ καὶ ἵππος  
ἔνδον ἐρητύεσκεν. Ὅ δ' ἐνθέμενος φρεσὶ κάρτος (370)  
λώβης οὐκ ἀλέγιζεν ἀεικέος, ἀλλ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ  
ἔτλη καὶ πληγῇσι καὶ ἐν πυρὶ τειρόμενός περ  
ἀργαλέως. Ἥρῃ γὰρ ἐνέπνευσε<ν> μέγα κάρτος.

...and went on stabbing the crafty fellow  
For a very long time. But he, as firm as a rock, (365)

<sup>52</sup> Cuypers (2000) 606-7 also suggests that "we should perhaps entertain the possibility that the large discrepancies between Q. and Virgil in story matter, and the scant evidence for allusion, are not the result of ignorance but of a well-considered 'political' scheme to ignore the Romans' national epic and supplant it with a Greek account of the end of the Trojan War, viewed from the Greek perspective."

<sup>53</sup> See Aeneas' damning comments on Greek cunning and artful perjury in Virg. A. 2.65-6, 105-6, 152-3, and 195-8. Cf. Manuwald (1985) 207, Deroux (1988) 887, and Lynch (1990) 119.

<sup>54</sup> Lynch (1990) 119. The Achaemenides episode will later (Virg. A. 3.588-691) accentuate the Trojans' moderation through allusion to the Sinon scene: even though Achaemenides speaks a lot like Sinon, the Trojans do not take revenge on this potentially dangerous Greek. See Ramminger (1991) 59.

<sup>55</sup> There could be a hint, in 12.418-22, that their guilt for the maltreatment of Sinon brought about their destruction.

Was armed with limbs that never flinched. They ended  
By cutting from his body his ears as well as his nose,  
Completely disfiguring him to make him tell the truth,  
Where the Danaan ships had gone and whether the horse  
Held some of them inside. But such was his resolute spirit (370)  
That, disregarding their shameful treatment, he bore up  
Firmly under their blows and under terrible torture  
By fire; so great was the strength breathed into him by Hera.

Sinon is qualified here as a “crafty fellow” (vv. 364: *δολόφρονα*), but this possible moral fault of his is overshadowed by the much more morally damning behaviour of the Trojans, who end up lopping off his ears and nose to make him confess the truth. As Hall notes<sup>56</sup>, mutilation came to be viewed from a very early age as a characteristically barbaric act. Considering that the Scholia to the *Iliad* (especially the bT tradition), as well as the dramas that reworked stories taken from the Cyclic Epics, viewed the myth with a Hellenocentric bias, often representing the Trojans as an Asian, decadent nation<sup>57</sup>, it is not difficult to see how Quintus may have been able to “activate” a current interpretation of the Trojans as barbarian Phrygians or proto-Persians, and why he may have chosen to do this precisely at the point where Virgil made a statement about the Trojans (as proto-Romans) being humane and moral, as opposed to the cunning, perfidious Greeks<sup>58</sup>. Mythological revision seems to be loaded with political significance.

Quintus’ Sinon seems to expect that he will be tortured in the hands of the Trojans: in his speech to Odysseus, where he volunteers to stay behind with the Horse, he says that he will do his job, “However they misuse me, even if they decide / To throw me alive in a fire” (vv. 249–50: *εἴ τέ μ’ ἀεικίζωσι καὶ εἰ πυρὶ μητιόωνται / βάλλειν ζῶν ἐόντα*). His next statement, that his “heart is firmly resolved / Either to die at the hands of the foe or, by escaping / To win great

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<sup>56</sup> See Hall (1989) 23–4 and 103–5. Tereus, for example, who raped and mutilated Philomela, was transformed in drama from a Megarian to a Thracian.

<sup>57</sup> See Hall (1989) 32–4 and 23–4. For the theory that Quintus takes this version of the myth from a lost tragedy by Sophocles, see the argument of Vrugt-Lentz (1967), above n. 50.

<sup>58</sup> Virgil makes some allusions to the possibility of having Sinon tortured or killed (A. 2.62, 64, 103); thus, his refusal to include Sinon’s maltreatment in his version becomes emphatic and significant. Cf. Vian (1959a) 64.

glory for the Argives in their need” (vv. 250–2: τὸ γάρ νύ μοι εὖαδε θυμῷ, / ἢ θανέειν δηίοισιν ὑπ’ ἀνδράσιν ἢ ὑπαλύξαι / Ἀργείοις μέγα κῦδος ἐλδομένοισι φέροντα), bears a striking resemblance to a comment made by Aeneas, in his introduction of Sinon in the *Aeneid*: Sinon was “assured in nerve, and prepared one way or the other – to bring off his underhand scheme (for they did not know him) or meet a certain death” (A. 2.61–2: *fidens animi atque in utrumque paratus*, / *seu uersare dolos seu certae occumbere morti*). If Quintus is indeed making a specific textual reference to the *Aeneid*, the effect he is creating is one of contrast; this is no longer just literary *imitatio* or *aemulatio*, but, rather, a case of politically motivated “renegade” reading and re-writing<sup>60</sup>.

The implications are wider than the transformation of one single character. The villainous Sinon of the *Aeneid* becomes here a real hero, since he is willing to risk life and limb in the hands of the barbaric Trojans for the glory of Greece. In the process of Sinon’s recasting, the “underhand scheme” (*dolos*) of Virg. A. 2.62 has been obliterated and replaced with the “great glory” (μέγα κῦδος) of *PH* 12.252. The slander against Greeks, that they are typically deceitful and manipulative, as the Virgilian Aeneas claims in the lines directly following this passage<sup>61</sup>, is erased in the *PH*, and the ancestors of the Romans are, instead, depicted as brutal and uncivilised. Sinon’s false speech (vv. 375–86) even contradicts the stereotype of the “Greek rhetorician”. As one scholar has put it, this is “a brief, manly utterance”<sup>62</sup>. Whereas Virgil’s Sinon employs elaborate language and excessive rhetorical tropes, which finally succeed in cheating the innocent, “artless” Trojans<sup>63</sup>, the Posthomeric Sinon’s speech is a surprisingly simple narration, lacking all the forcefulness, rhetorical flair, and passion that is

<sup>60</sup> See the discussion in Gärtner (2005) 171–3, esp. 173: “Quintus hätte somit an dieser Stelle nicht nur nach der für ihn typischen Weise ein Motiv aufgegriffen und breit ausgewalzt, sondern eine Darstellung vorgeführt, die dem Leser erst im Kontrast zu Vergil in ihrer ganzen Tragweite aufgeht.” The notion of “renegade” or “resisting” reading has been used mainly in feminist studies, for readerly responses available to women who refuse to conform to the literary (and social) stereotypes of femininity; see, e.g., Fetterley (1978).

<sup>61</sup> See Virg. A. 2.65–6: *accipe nunc Danaum insidias et crimine ab uno / disce omnis* (“Now hear how the Greeks tricked us; learn from one case of their wickedness what every Greek is like”).

<sup>62</sup> Clausen (1987) 33.

<sup>63</sup> See Virg. A. 2.106: *ignari scelerum tantorum artisque Pelasgae* (“Greek cunning, evil on such a scale, being as yet beyond us”). For a detailed examination of Sinon’s rhetorics in A. 2, see Lynch (1990) 114–7. Knox (1950) 390–1 also points out Sinon’s connections with the metaphor of the snake: not only is it present in his name (Sinon ~ sinus, sinuo), it also appears in his language: in v. 136 he describes his concealment with the verb *delitui*, from *delitescere*, a rare verb, which is “used with peculiar appropriateness of the serpent”.

characteristic of other speeches in the epic, and which the reader would have expected in the case of Sinon as well<sup>64</sup>. The Trojans are not tricked by false eloquence in this narrative; they believe the plain tale of a prisoner under torture.

The Sinon episode of Quintus closes with the narrator praising his courageous hero in a gnomic statement: “a strong man will endure the evil he cannot avoid” (v. 388: *ἀνδρὸς γὰρ κρατεροῖο κακὴν ὑποτλήναι ἀνάγκην*). When Sinon re-emerges after the fall of Troy, in Book 14 (vv. 107–14), he is admired and honoured with gifts by the other Achaeans not for his “craftiness” (*PH* 12.364: *δολόφρονα*, quoted above), but for “for having endured / The grievous torture of the enemy” (vv. 107–8: *οὔνεχ’ ὑπέτλη / λώβην δυσμενέων πολυκηδέα*). This passage also closes with a *γνώμη* from the main narrator (vv. 112–4): a “wise and sensible” man (v. 112: *ἀνέρι γὰρ πινυτῶ καὶ ἐπίφρονι*) prefers glory to any other good available to humans.

Sinon is, at the end, re-defined as a “far-famed” (14.107: *περικλυτόν*) hero, and it is perhaps significant that his model of heroism is a rather passive one compared with traditional war heroics. The “successful” Greek, on whom victory depended, is not one distinguished in battle, nor (explicitly at least) the cunning Odysseus who conceived the idea of the Horse, but someone who could bear whatever treatment was meted out to him, keeping his knowledge to himself. That his fundamental strength is endurance, and not eloquence, could possibly be a manifestation of the Stoic undercurrent in the *PH*<sup>65</sup>, but it is more importantly a case of revisioning, not only Virgil’s narrative, but Greek identity itself: the virtue by which Sinon wins the war for the Greeks is essentially, and ironically, Roman (*firmitas*, or *constantia*)<sup>66</sup>. Quintus’ text appears to be an active participant in an incomplete, tension-ridden, but nevertheless ongoing process of ‘becoming Roman, staying (or becoming) Greek’, where the categories of “Roman” and “Greek” are constantly shifted and re-negotiated<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> See Vian (1969) 74: “Les personnages de Quintus s’expriment en général dans un style véhément et pathétique. Rien de tel ici: pas un seul vocatif, aucune interjection, pas la moindre adjuration”.

<sup>65</sup> On Stoicism in the *PH* see Maciver (this volume) 5–7 and (specifically on Sinon) 13 n. 60.

<sup>66</sup> See Barton (2001) 182–3 for the Roman admiration of the *infatians*, the type of hero who displays “constant silence” (Tac. *Ann.* 15.60.2) under the threat of torture or death.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Whitmarsh (2001a) 1–22.

## The Electras of Quintus and Nonnus

An important element in the articulation of Greek identity during the Second Sophistic is what has been called its “Athenocentricity”<sup>69</sup>. As Schubert argues<sup>70</sup>, even though Athens does not have an obvious role to play in the *PH*, the arrangement of episodes at the end of Book 13 implicitly suggests a transfer of power not from Troy to Rome, but from Troy to Athens. The comparison between the fates of Athenian Aethra on the one hand, and Trojan Hecuba and Laodike on the other brings out the contrast between an emerging, successful Athens and an irreversibly falling Troy. The final story of Book 13, immediately following the account of Laodike, concerns Electra, one of the seven Pleiades, daughters of Atlas, and mother of Dardanus from Zeus. In *PH* 13.551–9, already catasterised, and watching from the sky “the sacred city” (v. 558) being destroyed, the Trojan ancestress conceals herself in mist and cloud, thus rendering her star invisible for mortals:

...ἥς εἵνεκά φασι καὶ αὐτὴν  
Ἥλέκτρην βαθύπεπλον ἐὼν δέμας ἀμφικαλύψαι  
ἄχλυι καὶ νεφέεσσιν ἀνηναμένην χορὸν ἄλλων  
Πληιάδων αἵ δὴ οἱ ἀδελφειαὶ γεγάασιν·  
ἀλλ’ αἱ μὲν μογεροῖσιν ἐπόψιαι ἀνθρώποισιν (555)  
ἱλαδὸν ἀντέλλουσιν ἐς οὐρανόν, ἥ δ’ ἄρα μούνη  
κεύθεται αἰὲν ἄιστος, ἐπεὶ ῥά οἱ υἱέος ἐσθλοῦ  
Δαρδάνου ἱερὸν ἄστυ κατήριπεν, οὐδέ οἱ αὐτὸς  
Ζεὺς ὕπατος χραίσμησεν ἀπ’ αἰθέρος...

...They say that for that city  
Long-robed Electra actually concealed her form  
In mist and cloud, renouncing the company of the other  
Pleiades, which are her sister stars.  
The others are clearly visible to toiling mortals, (555)  
Rising into the sky as a troop, while she alone  
Is always hidden from sight, because it was her good son  
Dardanos whose sacred city fell with no help

<sup>69</sup> Spawforth (1994) 246.

<sup>70</sup> See Schubert (this volume) 13–16.



From great Zeus himself in heaven...

This story is well-attested as the *αἴτιον* for the faintness of one of the seven Pleiades<sup>71</sup>. Its presence here could serve a number of functions: first, it furthers the theme of “unhappy Trojan women”, thus reinforcing the contrast with the “happy ending” of Aethra’s story. Moreover, its aetiological aspect helps establish a connection between the mythological content of the poem and the physical reality of the reader’s world. But, more importantly, the concealment of Electra’s star makes the *pathos* ensuing from the fall of Troy distant, mystical, and eternal. It is no longer the sorrow of mythological characters that can speak and act (like Hecuba and Laodike), but “catasterised” sorrow, that has been crystallised in the remote, unchanging, celestial sphere. In a way, the fact that the seventh Pleiad is always invisible is not only a reminder that “Troy was once captured”, but a guarantee that “Troy remains captured”, and, therefore, does not have a future.

The contrast with Nonnus’ treatment of the myth of Electra will elucidate this point. In Book 3 of the *Dion.*, we find Cadmus, the grandfather of Dionysus, sailing around the Mediterranean looking for his kidnapped sister Europa. He lands, after a storm, on Samothrace, where he meets Emathion, the ruler of the island, and his mother, the Pleiad Electra. In vv. 195–202, the omniscient narrator gives us some information about Dardanus, the eldest son of Electra<sup>72</sup>:

Δάρδανος, Ἡμαθίωνος ἀδελφεός, ὃν Διὸς εὖναι (195)  
ἦροσαν, ὃν κομέεσκε Δίκη τροφός, εὔτε λαβοῦσαι  
σκῆπτρα Διὸς καὶ πέπλα Χρόνου καὶ ῥάβδον Ὀλύμπου  
εἰς δόμον Ἡλέκτρης βασιληίδες ἔδραμον ὦραι  
κοιρανίης ἀλύτοιο προμάντιες Αὔσονιήων·  
καὶ βρέφος ἐθρέψαντο, καὶ ἀτρέπτω Διὸς ὀμφῇ (200)  
κοῦρος ἀνασταχύων παλιναυξέος ἄνθεμον ἥβης  
Ἡλέκτρης λίπεν οἶκον...

<sup>71</sup> See the sources listed in Vian (1969) 231, n. 6, and Gärtner (1999) 22.

<sup>72</sup> The text of Nonnus is reproduced from the Budé edition: Chuvin (1976) for books 3–4, and Chuvin – Fayant (2006) for book 41. Translations are adapted from Rouse (1940).

This Dardanos, Emathion's brother, was one that the bed of Zeus had begotten, whom Justice nursed and cared for at the time when the royal Seasons ran to the palace of Electra, bearing the sceptre of Zeus, and the mantle of Time, and the staff of Olympus, to prophesy the indissoluble dominion of the Ausonian race. They brought up the baby; and by an irrevocable oracle of Zeus the lad just sprouting the flower of recrescent youth left Electra's house...

The description of Dardanus' birth is remarkable, in that it includes all the *τόποι* about the Roman Empire that Quintus avoids mentioning. The "royal" Seasons bring to new-born Dardanus "the sceptre of Zeus, and the robe of Time, and the staff of Olympus" (v. 197), emblems of universal, but also eternal sovereignty<sup>73</sup>. The baby is nursed by Justice herself (v. 196). And the fact that these qualities reflect not (only) on Dardanus himself, but to the rule of his descendants, the Romans, is made clear in v. 199, where the narrator restates his certainty that the rule of the Ausonian race will be indissoluble. The following lines further highlight a sense of pressing destiny, by claiming that it was an "irrevocable oracle of Zeus" that commanded Dardanus to leave Samothrace for (what is going to be) Troy.

Later in the same book, in a conversation between Cadmus and Electra, where the two exchange family stories involving migration or exile, Electra mentions, among other things, her son's going to the Troad, but also her own hope that one day she will be catasterised along with her sisters:

«Πρὸς δ' ἔτι καὶ τόδε μᾶλλον ὀδύρομαι· ἀρτιθαλῆς γὰρ  
υἱὸς ἐμὸς λιπόπατρις, ὅτε χνόον ἔσχεν ἰούλων,  
Δάρδανος Ἰδαίης μετανάσσατο κόλπον ἀρούρης, (345)  
καὶ Φρυγίῳ Σιμόεντι θαλύσια δῶκε κομάτων  
Θυμβραίου ποταμοῖο πιὼν ἀλλότριον ὕδωρ... (347)  
Ἕμπης τόσσα παθοῦσα παρήγορον ἐλπίδα βόσκω (351)  
Ζηνὸς ὑποσχέσῃσιν, ὅτι γνωτῇσι σὺν ἄλλαις  
ἐκ χθονὸς Ἀτλάντειον ἐλεύσομαι εἰς πόλον ἄστρων,  
οὐρανὸν οἶκον ἔχουσα, καὶ ἔσσομαι ἑβδομος ἀστήρ.»

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<sup>73</sup> On the interpretation of these uncommon emblems, see the notes in Chuvin (1976) 141.

“Here is something besides which I lament even more – in the bloom of his youth my own son has left his home, just when the down was on his cheek, my Dardanus has gone abroad to the bosom of the Idaian land; he has given the firstling crop of his hair to Phrygian Simoeis, and drunk the alien water of river Thymbrios [...] Still and all with these great suffering I feed a comforting hope, by the promises of Zeus, that with my other sisters I shall pass from the earth to the stars’ Atlantean vault, and dwell in heaven myself a star with my sisters six.”

Electra is here looking forward to her future catasterism: Zeus’ promises seem to guarantee a happy life in heaven; there is no mention of her star being faint or concealed. Electra is also informed about the new country of Dardanus and its geography: close to the famous river Simoeis, she mentions the obscure “Thymbraios”. This river does not appear at all in the *Iliad*, although it is referred to in some later sources<sup>74</sup>. The purpose of its mention here could have something to do with its name being extremely close to “Thymbris”, which is what the Greeks called the Tiber. For example, in *PH* 13.337 (quoted above), Kalchas refers to Aeneas’ migration from Troy to the site of Rome as moving “from the Xanthos to the broad-flowing ‘Thymbris’”. So, Nonnus’ Dardanus is, suggestively, already a Roman, prefiguring his descendants in drinking water from a Thymbr(a)i(o)s river, even if Electra is not conscious of this.

The next passage in the *Dion.* that refers to the Roman Empire will show more clearly how Nonnus’ narrative manages to sidestep the fall of Troy, by connecting Electra and her offspring directly to Rome. When Hermes flies to Samothrace to tell Electra that she should give her foster daughter, Harmonia, to be Cadmus’ wife, he starts his speech with a prophecy (3.425–31):

«μητροकाσιγνήτη, Διδὸς εὐνέτι, χαῖρε, γυναικῶν (425)  
πασάων μετόπισθε μακαρτάτη, ὅττι Κρονίων  
κοιρανίην κόσμοιο τεοῖς τεκέεσσι φυλάσσει,  
καὶ χθονὸς ἅστεα πάντα κυβερνήσει σέο φύτλη,  
ἔδνα τεῆς φιλότητος, ἐμῇ δ’ ἅμα μητέρι Μαίῃ  
ἄστρασιν ἑπταπόροισι συναστράψειας Ὀλύμπῳ. (430)

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<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Strab. 13.1.35. Chuvin identifies this river as “le Kemar Su [...] un affluent du Scamandre”; see Chuvin (1976) 149, n. 347.

σύνδρομος Ἡελίοιο, συναντέλλουσα Σελήνη. »

“Good be with you, my mother’s sister, bedfellow of Zeus! Most blessed of all women that shall be hereafter, because Cronion keeps the lordship of the world for your children, and your stock shall steer all the cities of the earth! This is the dower of your love. And along with Maia my mother you shall shine with the Seven Stars in the sky, running your course with Helios, rising with Selene.”

Hermes’ prophecy enhances the praise of the Empire, by giving it soteriological overtones. The salutation (vv. 425–6), as Chuvín notes<sup>75</sup>, shares the theme and vocabulary of the addresses of Gabriel and Elizabeth to Mary in Luke’s Gospel (1.28 and 42). Mary is blessed among women because of her child, who is going to be the saviour of mankind; Electra is *μακαράτη*, because her son, Dardanus will be the *auctor* of a race, whose rule will benefit the world. What is explicitly highlighted is the universal aspect of the Empire, as we have seen it in Quintus, but the use here of the verb *κυβερνήσει* (v. 428: “to steer”) is significant. Where Quintus’ Kalchas had the offspring of Aeneas “ruling over” the entire world (13.340: *ἀνάξειν*) Nonnus’ *κυβερνήσει* means that Rome “steers” or guides the other cities; the Empire is now perceived more as a Commonwealth<sup>76</sup>.

The unconditional praise of Rome also means that the “failure” of Troy is completely omitted: power seems to be passed down directly from Dardanus to his Roman descendants. The star of Electra is never concealed; what Hermes tells her is that she “shall shine” (430)<sup>77</sup>. Indeed, in her last appearance in the epic (13.412–6), she appears in the sky with her six sisters, as a good sign for the war Dionysus is embarking on. All in all, Nonnus constructs an Electra very different from Quintus’, just as he constructs a different Roman Empire. The final section of the paper will consider further the praise of Rome in the *Dion.*, and examine how it forms part of the cultural politics of the time.

### From Athens to Beirut

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<sup>75</sup> See Chuvín (1976) 151, n. 426.

<sup>76</sup> For the notion of Commonwealth in Late Antique politics, see Fowden (1993).

<sup>77</sup> See Chuvín (1976) 149, n. 354.

In Book 41 of the *Dion.* we find two explicit references to the Roman Empire. These are associated with the birth of Beroe and foundation of her eponymous city, Beirut. According to Nonnus, this is the first city in the world, created before Tarsos, Thebes, and other famously ancient cities (v. 85–96), and her inhabitants are an autochthonous “golden crop of men” (v. 66: *χρύσειος... στάχυς ἀνδρῶν*). By virtue of her promixity to the origins of the cosmos, the city of Beirut is already a significant, symbolic landscape<sup>78</sup>.

The scene of Aphrodite giving birth to Beroe is actually quite reminiscent of the birth of Dardanus: Hermes and Themis, who attend Aphrodite at her labour, bear the *insignia* of Beroe’s future: a Latin tablet, and the laws of Solon (160, 165); the cosmic significance of the birth is marked by the presence of the *Ἰῶραι* (v. 184), and other primordial elements: the four Winds, that “ride through all cities to fill the whole earth with the precepts of Beroe” (v. 174–5), the Ocean pouring his waters around the world, and Aion bringing the robes of Justice (179: *πέπλα Δίκης*)<sup>79</sup>. The following passage elaborates on a well-known Golden Age *topos*: animals that usually attack each other are now playing, eating, and dancing together<sup>80</sup>. The reference to the Golden Age is clearly acknowledged afterwards with the introduction of Astraia, the “cherisher of the Golden Age” (v. 214: *χρυσέης θρέπτειρα γενέθλης*), as the nurse of Beroe.

Up until now the narrative of Beroe referred to a very distant, golden past. The rest of the account looks to the future. Aphrodite, anxious for her daughter’s destiny, travels to the hall of Harmonia in heaven, to inquire about the city that will have Beroe’s name. Harmonia’s tablets reveal that Beroe is indeed the most ancient city (v. 364), and so will be in charge of the Laws. But the prophetic text inscribed on the tablet also provides some other information about her future: the city will be called Berytus by the “colonizing sons of the Ausonians, the consular lights of Rome” (vv. 365–6: *μετανάσται / υἱέες Αὔσονίων, ὑπατήρια φέγγεα Ῥώμης*). The prophecy refers to the establishment

<sup>78</sup> See 41.95–6: *πρώτῃ κυανέης ἀπεσείσατο κῶνον ὀμίχλης, / καὶ χάος ζοφόεσσαν ἀπεστυφέλιξε καλύπτρην* (“[Beroe] first shook away the cone of darkling mist, and shook off the gloomy veil of chaos”). The creation of Beirut marks the inception of civilisation; cf. Chuvin (1991) 212–4.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Bajoni (2003) 200.

<sup>80</sup> Although this context is overlooked by commentators, Nonnus’ lines bear a strong resemblance to the *Or. Sib.* (3.787–95). Virgil uses the same motif for the description of his Golden Age in *E.* 4.22. In fact, like Virgil’s mysterious child, Beroe also falls in a category of supernatural, almost divine babies that smile at birth upon their mother (v. 212).

of a Roman colony in Beirut and its official name: *Colonia Julia Augusta Felix Berytus*<sup>81</sup>. A more detailed version of this prophecy appears in vv. 389–98, where Aphrodite reads herself on the tablet of Cronos the following words (vv. 389–98):

σκῆπτρον ὅλης Αὐγουστος ὅτε χθονὸς ἡνιοχεύσει,  
ῥώμη μὲν ζαθέη δωρήσεται Αὐσόνιος Ζεὺς (390)  
κοιρανίην, Βερόη δὲ χαρίζεται ἡνία θεσμῶν,  
ὁππότε θωρηχθεῖσα φερεσσακέων ἐπὶ νηῶν  
φύλοπιν ὕδρομόθοιο κατευνήσει Κλεοπάτρης·  
πρὶν γὰρ ἀτασθαλίη πτολιπόρθιος οὐ ποτε λήξει  
εἰρήνην κλονέουσα σάοπτολιν, ἄχρι δικάζει (395)  
Βηρυτὸς βιότοιο γαληναίοιο τιθήνη  
γαῖαν ὁμοῦ καὶ πόντον, ἀκαμπτεῖ τείχεϊ θεσμῶν  
ἄστεα πυργώσασα, μία πτόλις ἄστεα κόσμου.

When Augustus shall hold the sceptre of the world, Ausonian Zeus will give to divine Rome the lordship, and to Beirut he [i.e. Zeus] will grant the reins of law, when armed in her fleet of shielded ships she shall pacify the strife of battlestirring Cleopatra. For before that, citysacking violence will never cease to shake citysaving peace, until Berytos the nurse of quiet life does justice on land and sea, fortifying the cities with the unshakable wall of law, one city for all cities of the world.

The time of the foundation of the colony is now explicitly specified: Augustus will establish his veterans in the new colony of Beirut after prevailing over Cleopatra at Actium<sup>82</sup>. But this is more than just saying in a poetic way, as Cameron claims, that “the Law School dated from soon after Actium”<sup>83</sup>. The striking reference to Actium and Augustus’ crucial victory brings up, again, notions of just rule, eternity, and universality, but the praise of the Empire here is different, in that it ties this civilising process not only to Rome, but also to a city of the Eastern part of the Empire. Beirut emerges as a *locus* of universal

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<sup>81</sup> On the foundation (and possible re-naming) of Beirut by the Romans, see Lauffray (1977) 143–5, Accorinti (1996) 127–33, and Bajoni (2003) 201.

<sup>82</sup> One tradition says that Augustus himself established the colony after Actium and before 27 B.C.E.; another has Marcus Agrippa installing two legions there perhaps in 15/4 B.C.E. For the latter version see Strab. 16.2.19. Cf. Hall (2004) 47.

<sup>83</sup> Cameron (1970) 357–8.

significance: it is “one city for all the cities in the world” (v. 398), and there can be no peace without her doing justice over all land and sea<sup>84</sup>. The fact remains, however, that this Near-Eastern city, the most extensively praised location in the entire epic<sup>85</sup>, is demonstrably founded by the Romans, and has no remarkable Greek past<sup>86</sup>. Even the accomplishment for which the city is praised here, the Law School, is meant to be propagating Roman law and order. Against Menander Rhetor’s advice that the praise of a city for excellence in legal topics is now “pointless, because we all use the common laws of the Romans”<sup>87</sup>, Nonnus chooses to focus on a city famous for this exact topic. What could this insistence on Roman-ness mean in the fifth century, when Rome has already fallen?

Chuvin’s claim is that in the *Dion.* Dionysus and his army stand for the Byzantine Empire, and his opponents, the Indians, for Sassanian Persia<sup>88</sup>. This suggestion, namely that Nonnus is using the “Roman Empire” as a metaphor for Byzantium, seems plausible, but it does not explain the stress on Rome itself: vv. 366 and 390 refer to Rome (the city) by name, the first with an allusion to the institution of the consuls, the second in relation to a very specific historical event: Augustus’ victory at Actium. Moreover, the use of the adjective “Ausonian” in 3.199 and 41.390, as Bowersock has observed<sup>89</sup>, could only suggest a western, probably Italian nation. So, if not a metaphor, what then is the meaning of the Roman Empire in the *Dion.*?

It is obvious that, for Nonnus, *Romanitas* is not the same kind of problem it was for Quintus; perhaps it is not even a problem at all. One could hypothesise, however schematically, that a Greek of the third century, although complicit with the Empire’s ideology, would see Rome, with her political and economical

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<sup>84</sup> The view that “from Beirut and its law schools emanate the lawyers who, by applying Roman justice throughout the provinces, ensure the empire’s stability” is also expressed by the fourth-century author of the *Expositio totius mundi* (26); Fowden (1993) 64.

<sup>85</sup> See the landscape description in 41.14–49 and the hymn-like invocations in 143–54.

<sup>86</sup> On the Romanness of Beirut see Greg. Thaum. *In Orig. Or. Pan.* 5.66–7: πόλις Ῥωμαϊκωτέρα πως, καὶ τῶν νόμων τούτων εἶναι πιστευθεῖσα παιδευτήριον (“a city more Roman in a way, and entrusted to be a school for these laws”).

<sup>87</sup> See M.R. 364.13–4: διὰ τὸ τοῖς κοινοῖς χρῆσθαι τῶν Ῥωμαίων νόμοις ἄχρηστον.

<sup>88</sup> See Chuvin (1991) 23–6.

<sup>89</sup> See Bowersock (1994) 390–1, who believes, however, that “Rome and Augustus are incidental to the local histories of Samothrace, Troy, and Beirut.”

power, as a challenge to his cultural self-definition<sup>90</sup>. By the fifth century, the fall of Rome on the one hand, and the gradual evanescence of the Hellenocentric world-view on the other, made way for more ‘cosmopolitan’ cultural identities<sup>91</sup>, which included a Roman element more pronounced than before. *Romanitas* became, of course, useful during this period as a political tool as well: by appropriating Roman history, law, and institutions, the Eastern half of the Empire was able to establish itself as the “New Roman Empire” among other, ambitious successor-states<sup>92</sup>.

In a way, Nonnus is the end-product of a very long process of cultural assimilation, of “becoming Roman” and “becoming Greek”. He writes his poem in Greek, claims Homer as his “father”<sup>93</sup>, and incorporates in his epic elements from almost every genre of Greek literature available at the time. It is, however, important that geographical Greece has only a small role in the *Dion.*; although several episodes take place in or around ancient and celebrated Greek cities, none of these (including Athens, Argos, and Thebes) “is praised for itself, nor is a glorious future forecast for any of them”<sup>94</sup>.

In fact, Nonnus’ Beirut can be seen to take the prominent position, which would have rightfully belonged to Athens in a different cultural context. In the D Scholia on *Iliad* 18.491 we find an interpretation of the first city portrayed on the shield of Achilles as Athens<sup>95</sup>. According to the scholiast, we know that the city Hephaistus depicted on the shield is Athens, “because, during the the creation of the world, Athens was the first city” (ἐπεὶ κατὰ γένεσιν τοῦ κόσμου πρώτη πόλις Ἀθῆναι). The wedding and trial scenes on the shield are then easily explained, because the first wedding and the first law court were held in Athens (ἐν γὰρ Ἀθῆναις ταῦτα πρῶτον ἦχθη). Nonnus seems to have in mind the tradition of the primacy of Athens, as he constructs his own “first city”<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> This does not mean that authors of the Second Sophistic did not have more layers to their identity than Greekness. See, e.g., Jones (2004) for the civic, Roman, and even ‘barbarian’ affiliations of Pausanias and Aelius Aristides.

<sup>91</sup> See Bowersock (1995b).

<sup>92</sup> See Grant (1998) 1–29, and Williams – Friell (1999) 51, 157.

<sup>93</sup> See Nonn. *D.* 25.265, with Shorrock (2001) 170–4.

<sup>94</sup> Liebeschuetz (1996) 87.

<sup>95</sup> On this scholion and the “correlation between cosmology and history” in ancient criticism on the Homeric shield, see Hardie (1986) 344–5.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Aphrodite looking jealously at Athens after deciding to design a city for her daughter, Beroe (41.270–5).



When the autochthonous inhabitants of Beirut appear, we hear that they have a “perfect shape... not the form of primeval Cecrops, who crawled and scratched the earth with snaky feet... they had not the savage form of Erechtheus, whom Hephaistos begat on a furrow of Earth” (vv. 58–64). In contrast to the semi-bestial autochthonous Athenians, the first people of Beirut are “brought forth in the image of the gods” (v. 65: *θεῶν ἰνδαλμα*). Likewise, the laws of Solon (vv. 165 and 383) and the “Attic book” on which Beroe is born (v. 167) seem to form a kind of precedent, but they cannot substitute the peace bringing, Roman law practised by Beirut’s jurists. Beirut may not claim primacy in this matter, but she definitely claims socio-political value superior to that of Athens.

The culture and perspective of this fifth-century poet differ from those of his predecessors. It is possible for Nonnus to give his first hero in the epic, Cadmus, a double and non-Greek nationality, making him both Egyptian and Phoenician (3.275–99), and have him import nearly all culture (astronomy, writing, religion, and mysteries) from the East to Greece (4.259–84)<sup>97</sup>. Unlike the need of Quintus’ text to perform and redefine a Hellenic cultural identity against (and through) Rome, Nonnus’ epic confounds and collapses the categories of “Greek”, “Roman” and “barbarian”<sup>98</sup>; this is an age when Greece is no longer “the world”<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> See Gigli Piccardi (1998) and (2003) 262. Cf. Bowersock (1995b) on the revived interest in Herodotus.

<sup>98</sup> Nonnus has to go as far to the East as India in order to find a nation he can properly call “barbarian”, and even in the Indians’ case, their defeat leads directly to a kind of Roman-style “acculturation”; see Shorrock (this volume) 7–8 (section 3). The rest of the Graeco-Roman world seems to be connected through cultural and familial links, with the race of Cadmus playing a big role in this; see *D.* 3.257–371, and 13.363–77.

<sup>99</sup> See the title of Whitmarsh (2001b).

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